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(54) SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONFIGURATION, MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING OF NETWORK RESOURCES

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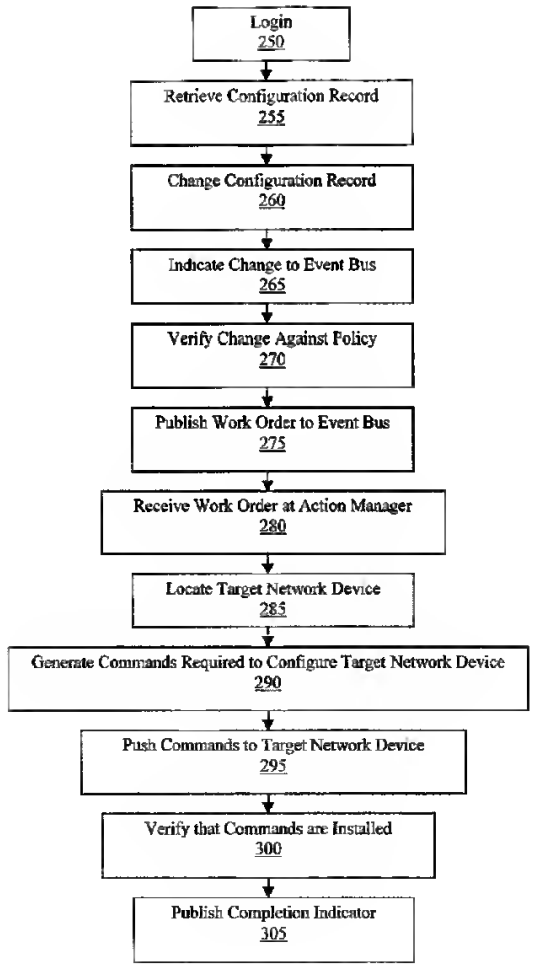
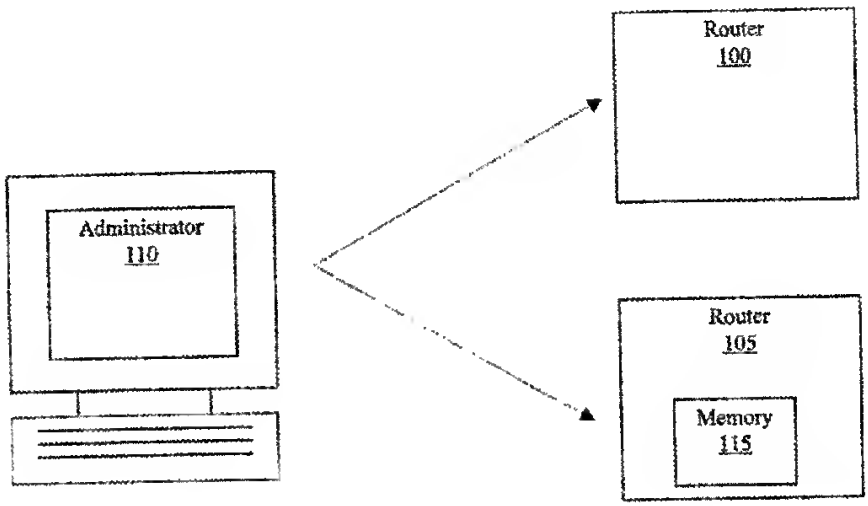
(57) ABSTRACT

A method and apparatus to configure, monitor and manage network devices without regard for device type and/or manufacturer is disclosed. One implementation of this embodiment includes a network manager unit disposed between the network administrator and the network devices. The network manager unit allows the administrator to holistically view, configure and manage an entire network without regard to device type and/or manufacturer. The administrator can implement this holistic approach with the use of a central repository for all configuration information and/or a central posting location for all network events.





(Prior Art)

FIGURE 1

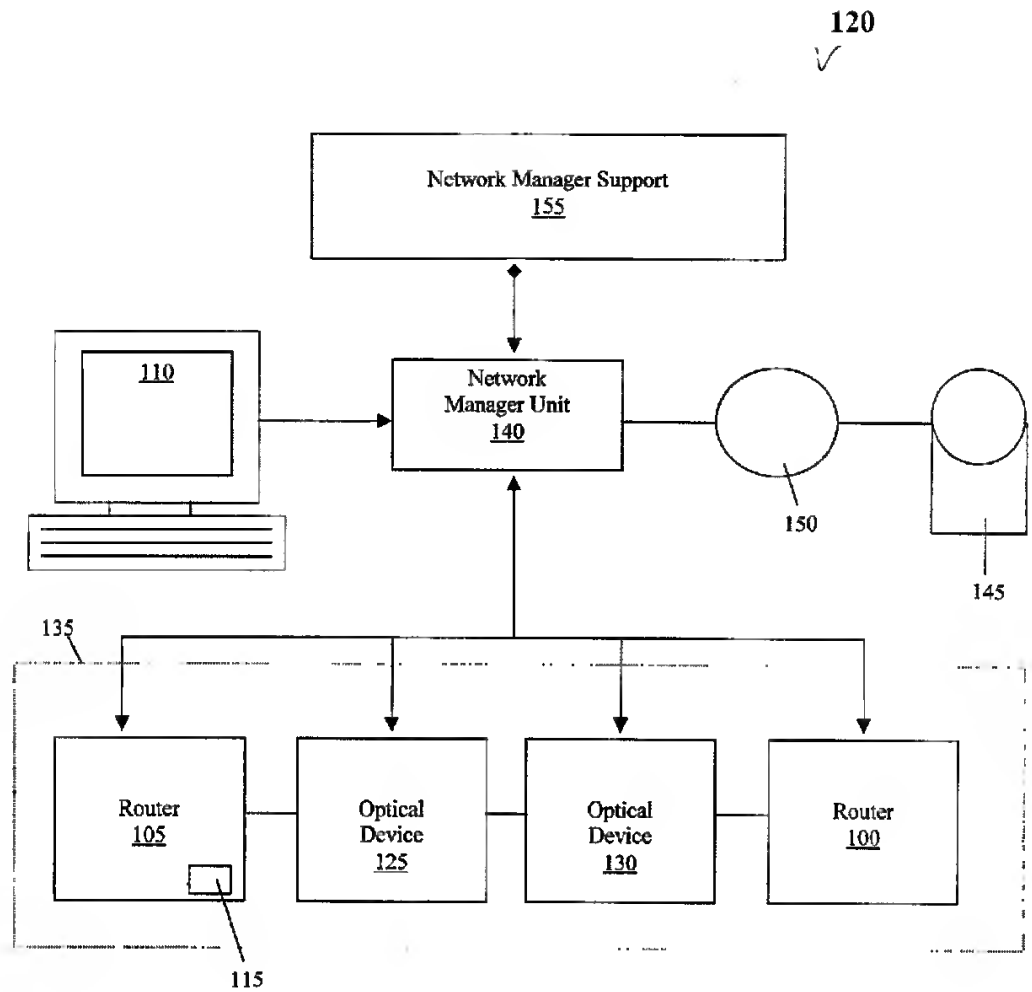

120
Network Manager Support
155
110
Network
Manager Unit
140
150
145
135
Router
105
Optical
Device
125
Optical
Device
130
Router
100
115

FIGURE 2

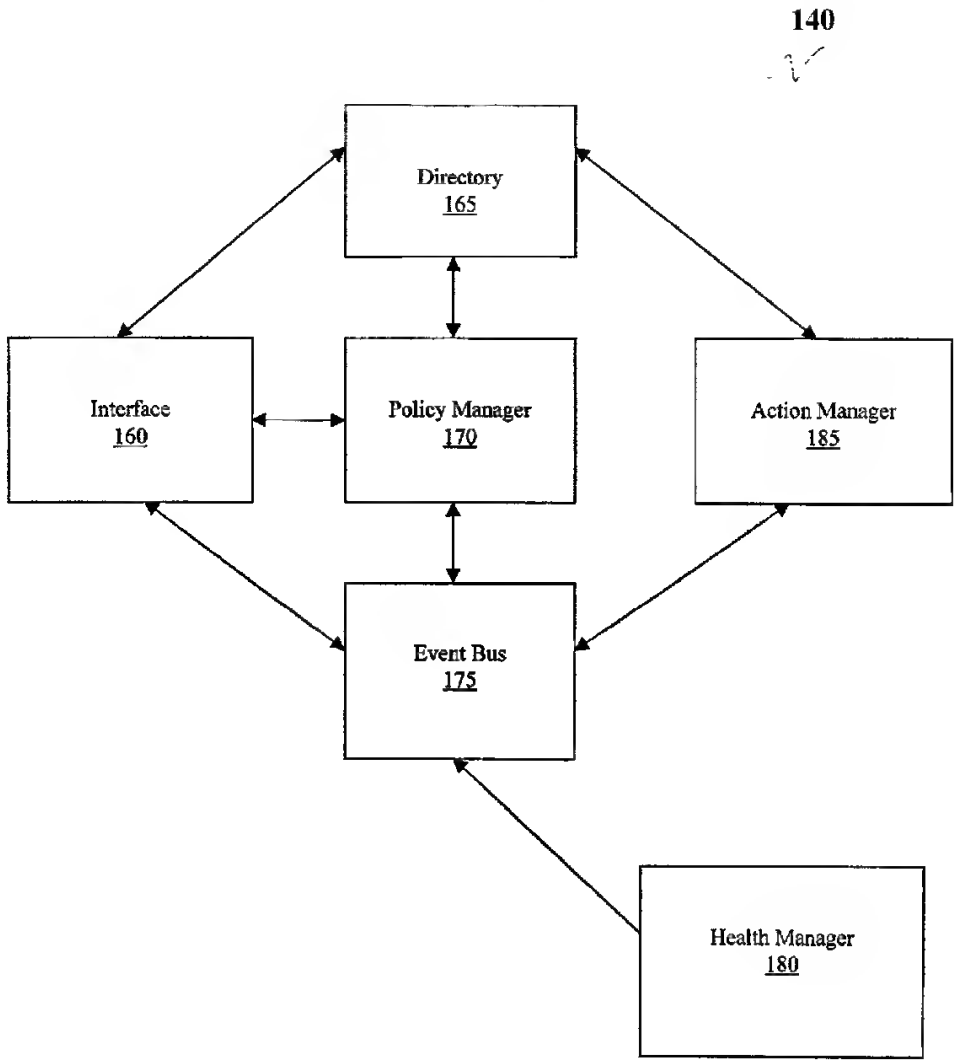

140
Directory
165
Interface
160
Policy Manager
170
Action Manager
185
Event Bus
175
Health Manager
180

FIGURE 3

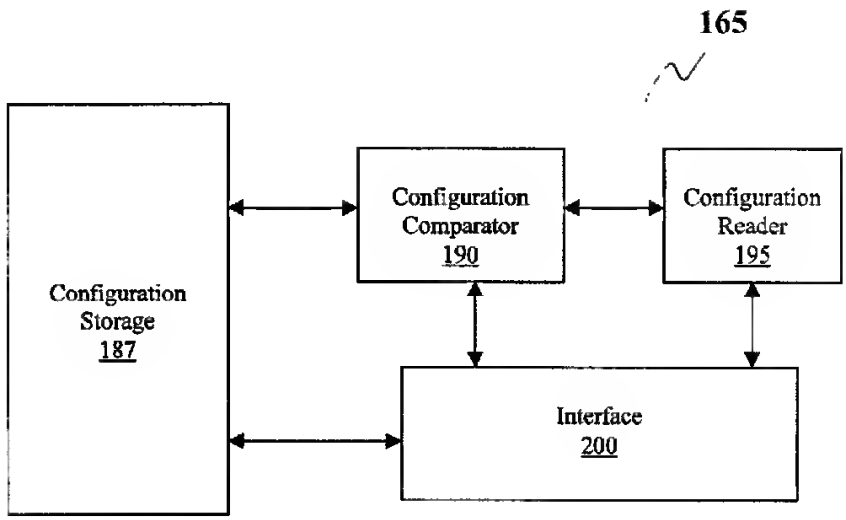

165
Configuration Storage 187
Configuration Comparator 190
Configuration Reader 195
Interface 200

FIGURE 4.

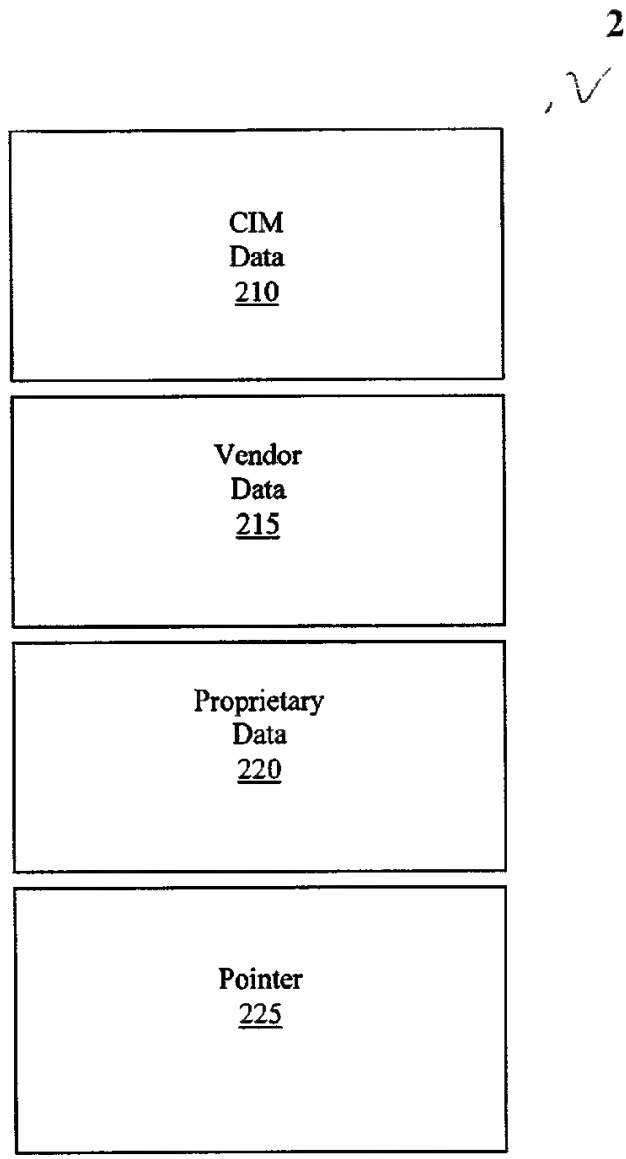

205
CIM
Data
210
Vendor
Data
215
Proprietary
Data
220
Pointer
225

FIGURE 5.

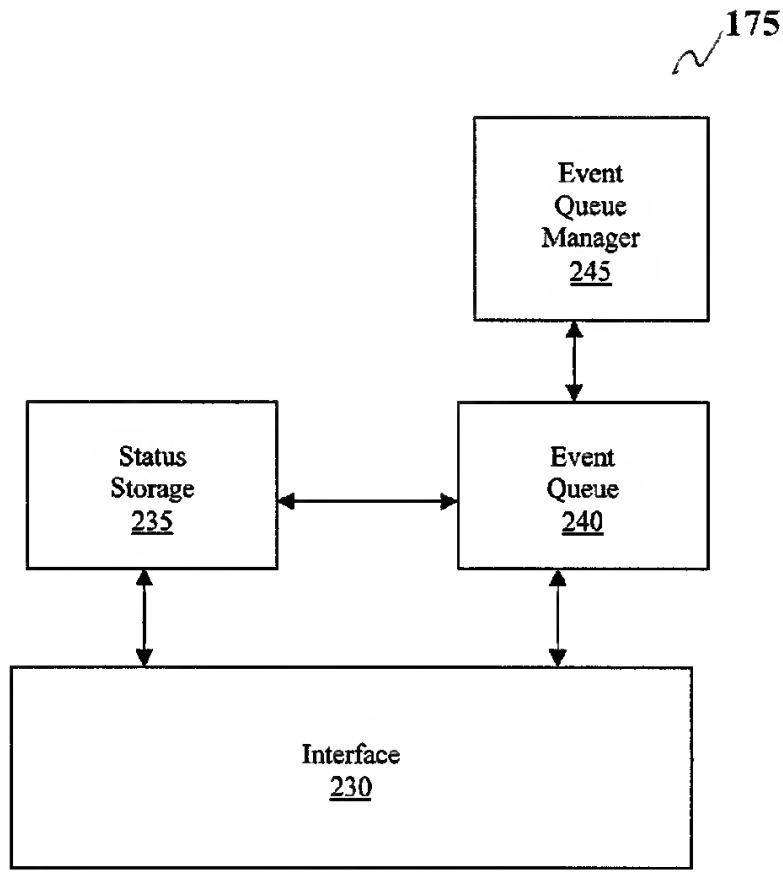

175
Event Queue Manager 245
Status Storage 235
Event Queue 240
Interface 230

FIGURE 6.

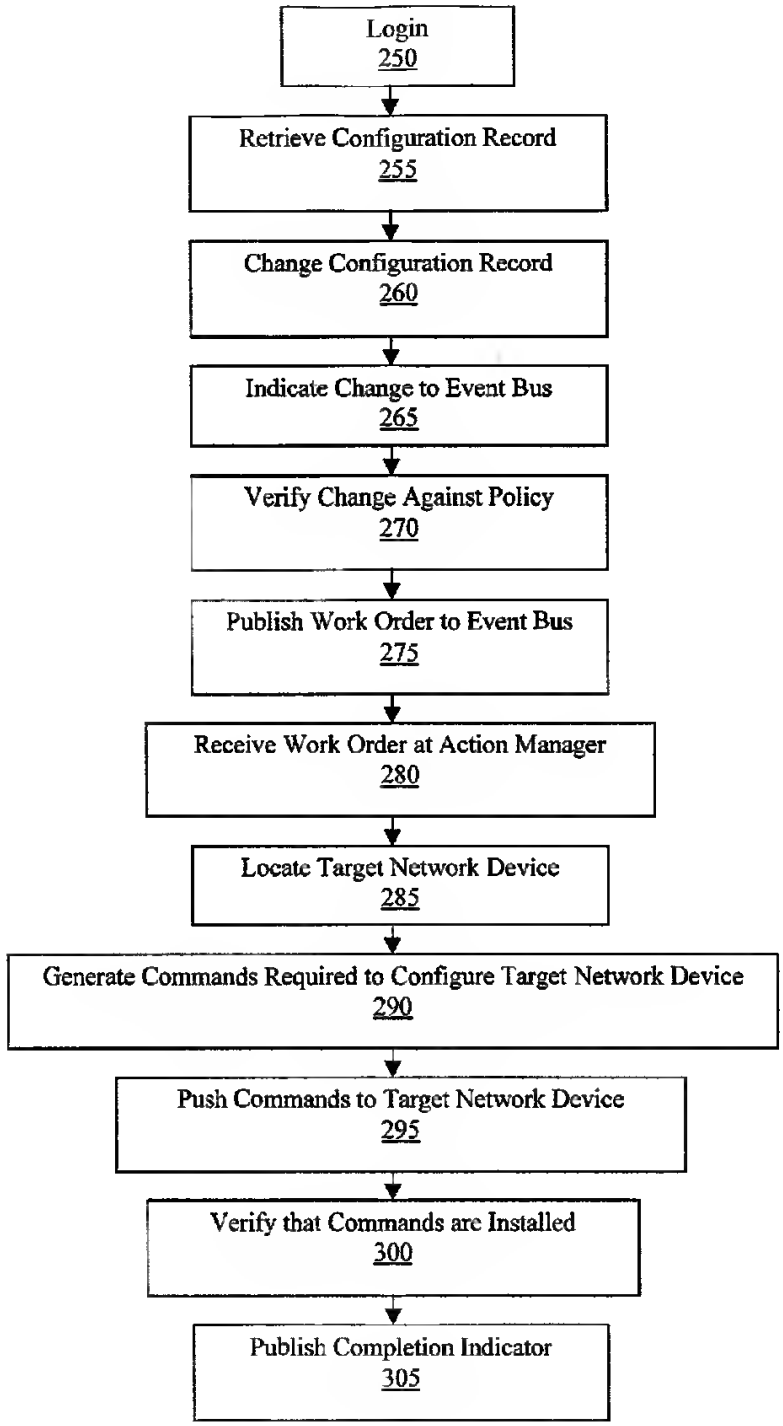

Login
250
Retrieve Configuration Record
255
Change Configuration Record
260
Indicate Change to Event Bus
265
Verify Change Against Policy
270
Publish Work Order to Event Bus
275
Receive Work Order at Action Manager
280
Locate Target Network Device
285
Generate Commands Required to Configure Target Network Device
290
Push Commands to Target Network Device
295
Verify that Commands are Installed
300
Publish Completion Indicator
305

FIGURE 7.

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONFIGURATION, MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING OF NETWORK RESOURCES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to network systems. More particularly, but not by way of limitation, the present invention relates to systems and methods for configuration, management and monitoring of network resources such as routers, optical devices and the like.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] With the ever-increasing reliance upon electronic data, businesses are becoming more and more reliant upon those networks responsible for distributing that data. Unfortunately, the rapid growth in the amount of data consumed by businesses has outpaced the development and growth of certain necessary network infrastructure components. One reason that the development and growth of the network infrastructure has lagged behind centers on the present difficulty in expanding, configuring, and reconfiguring existing networks. Even the most routine network expansions and reconfigurations, for example, require significant, highly technical, manual intervention by trained network administrators. Unfortunately, these highly trained network administrators are in extremely short supply. Thus, many needed network expansions and reconfigurations are delayed or even completely avoided because of the inability to find the needed administrators to perform the required laborious, technical tasks.

[0003] The present difficulty in configuring and reconfiguring networks is best illustrated by an example directed toward installing a single new router on an existing network. To install a new router (such as router **100** or **105** in **FIG. 1**), an administrator **110** first would need to choose a particular router with the best attributes for the network. The basic configuration of the new router generally will be defined by its manufacturer and its model. Although it would seem that the router should be chosen based upon its attributes, administrators **110** often choose a router based upon the identity of its manufacturer and the administrators' ability to configure devices from that manufacturer. Administrators **110**, for example, may only know how to configure and operate devices manufactured by Cisco Systems, Inc. and may overlook equal or even superior devices from other manufacturers merely because they cannot configure them.

[0004] After the administrator **110** has chosen the desired router (router **105**, for example), the administrator **110** generally will order the router **105** from the manufacturer and have it shipped, not necessarily to the installation site, but rather to the administrator's site where a basic configuration can be installed. The administrator **110** then ships the router **105** to the installation site where it can be physically installed. After the router **105** has been physically installed, the administrator **110** typically is manually notified, e.g., by telephone, that the router **105** is connected to the network. The administrator must then create the device-specific commands required to fully configure the router **105** and transfer those commands to the router's memory **115**. After the administrator **110** verifies that the device-specific commands were installed correctly, the router **105** can be brought online.

[0005] Obviously, the steps required for an administrator to configure a single router are quite cumbersome and require significant technical skill. The problem, however, is even more severe when the administrator desires to simultaneously configure or reconfigure several network devices. First, the administrator, for example, would need to manually identify the network devices that need to be configured or reconfigured. For example, if the administrator desired to turn up service between two points, the administrator would need to identify the routers along the path between the two points. The administrator would then need to verify that the policies and rules established for the network permit the contemplated reconfiguration for those devices. Assuming that the reconfiguration is within the network's policies and rules, the administrator would need to create the device-specific code required to reconfigure each of the identified devices. In many instances, the same device-specific code cannot be used on all of the devices. For example, the device-specific commands required to reconfigure a Cisco™ router differ significantly from the device-specific commands required to reconfigure a Juniper™ router. Thus, if the identified network devices include both Cisco™ and Juniper™ routers, the administrator would be required to create different versions of the device-specific commands, thereby significantly increasing the chance for error in the reconfiguration process.

[0006] Once the device-specific commands have been created for each of the identified network devices, the commands must be manually transmitted to each device. That is, a connection, e.g., a telnet connection, must be established to each device and the particular commands transferred thereto. After each device has received its commands, the network administrator must manually reconnect to each device and verify that the device received the proper commands and that it is operating properly.

[0007] Although some tools have been developed to help administrators perform certain ones of the laborious tasks of network management, these tools are extremely limited in their application. For example, CiscoWorks™ is a group of unrelated tools that can aid administrators in some enterprise level tasks. CiscoWorks™ and similar tools provide singularly focused, unrelated tools to perform activities such as quality of service (QOS) provisioning and network policy management. These tools do not provide a way to interrelate the various happenings in a network. In essence, these present network tools lack a holistic approach to network administration.

[0008] Moreover, tools like CiscoWorks™ are generally dedicated to the management of one type of network device, e.g., router or optical device, and one brand of network device. For example, CiscoWorks™ does not help an administrator configure a Juniper™ router, and it does not help an administrator configure optical devices. Thus, if the network has both CiSeO™ and Juniper™ devices, multiple, unrelated tools must be utilized to perform basic network management tasks. Unfortunately, because these multiple, unrelated tools are so difficult to manage, network administrators are prone to select routers based upon manufacturer identity rather than upon device features.

[0009] In addition to several other drawbacks, these singularly focused network tools result in substandard fault detection and recovery. For example, in present systems,

once a configuration is changed, there is no easy way to "back out" of that configuration if a problem arises. Presently, if a new configuration for a target device fails, the network administrator would be forced to recreate the device-specific commands of the target device's previous configuration, manually connect to the device and then transmit the recreated device-specific commands to the device. As can be appreciated, this process can be extremely time consuming and error prone.

[0010] The lack of a comprehensive, holistic tool to manage network resources has led to slowed expansion and the under utilization of existing networks. As skilled administrators become more scarce and as networks grow larger and more complicated, the problems surrounding network management could reach crisis proportions. Accordingly, an integrated network administration tool is needed. In particular, a system and method are needed to efficiently configure, monitor and manage network devices without regard for device type and/or manufacturer.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] To remedy the above described and other deficiencies of the current technology, a system and method for the configuration and monitoring of network devices has been developed. In one embodiment, the present invention provides a system and method to configure, monitor and/or manage network devices without regard to device type and/or manufacturer identity. One implementation of this embodiment includes a network manager unit disposed between the network administrator and the network devices. The network manager unit allows the administrator to holistically view, configure and manage an entire network. That is, the administrator can view, configure and manage, for example, both optical devices and/or routers without regard to manufacturer identity or specific model. The administrator can implement this holistic approach with the use of a central repository for all configuration information and/or a central posting location for all network events.

[0012] In one embodiment, for example, an administrator can configure a new device or reconfigure an existing device by logging into the network manager unit and selecting a particular network device to configure. The network manager unit can then retrieve a configuration record unique to the selected network device from the common repository and provide that record to the administrator. After receiving the record, the administrator can change fields therein without regard for manufacturer identity of the network device. Next, the network manager unit can automatically verify that the requested changes to the configuration record comply with the policies and rules established for the network, and assuming that the changes do not violate any of the policies or rules, the network manager unit can update and store the modified configuration record in the central repository. A copy of the old configuration record can be kept in the central repository for fault recovery, modeling and other purposes.

[0013] Once the configuration record has been changed, network manager unit can use the fields of the modified configuration record to generate the actual device-specific commands needed to configure the selected network device. For example, the fields in the configuration record can be used to populate variable fields in a device-specific code template. In such an embodiment, the administrator is not required to know or create the actual device-specific commands that are required to configure the selected network device. Instead, the administrator only needs to know the general objective such as "enable router." The network manager unit will transform this general objective into the actual device-specific commands.

[0014] After the network manager unit has created the device-specific commands to match the altered configuration record, these commands are automatically pushed to the selected network device and stored in memory therein. A copy of those commands is also stored in association with the configuration record. Finally, after the new device-specific commands have been pushed to the selected network device, the network manager unit can verify the proper installation and operation of the new configuration information.

[0015] In essence, one embodiment of the present invention allows a configuration record to be created and/or modified for each network device regardless of the device's type, manufacturer or model. Each of the configuration records can be stored in a central repository for simplified access, retrieval and editing. Thus, to change the configuration for any network device, the network manager unit need only retrieve the altered configuration record from the central repository, generate the device-specific commands based upon that configuration record and push those generated device-specific commands to the target network device.

[0016] In another innovative aspect, the present invention enables automatically responses to network events. For example, network devices can be configured to post messages to a central posting location at the network manager unit. The network manager unit can read these posted network events from the central posting location and determine a proper response based upon predefined rules and policies. The network manager unit can then automatically implement the response. For example, if a particular router becomes congested, that router can post a message to the central posting location. The network manager unit can then read that message and determine the appropriate response for the congested router. The policy could indicate, for example, that the router configuration should be changed to enable congestion handling features. The network manager unit, in this scenario, could automatically reconfigure the router to enable those congestion-handling features.

[0017] As can be appreciated by those skilled in the art, the present invention addresses the significant shortfalls in present network technology. In particular, the present invention, provides a holistically way to configure, manage and view an entire network system. These and other advantages of the present invention are described more fully herein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] Various objects and advantages and a more complete understanding of the present invention are apparent and more readily appreciated by reference to the following Detailed Description and to the appended claims when taken in conjunction with the accompanying Drawings wherein:

[0019] **FIG. 1** illustrates a present system for configuring network routers;

[0020] **FIG. 2** illustrates a system for configuring network devices in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

[0021] **FIG. 3** illustrates in more detail the network manager unit shown in **FIG. 2**;

[0022] **FIG. 4** illustrates in more detail the directory element shown in **FIG. 3**,

[0023] **FIG. 5** illustrates a configuration record for a typical network device in accordance with the present invention;

[0024] **FIG. 6** illustrates in more detail the event bus shown in **FIG. 3**; and

[0025] **FIG. 7** is a flow chart of a method for configuring a network device in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0026] Although the present invention is open to various modifications and alternative constructions, a preferred exemplary embodiment that is shown in the drawings is described herein in detail. It is to be understood, however, that there is no intention to limit the invention to the particular forms disclosed. One skilled in the art can recognize that there are numerous modifications, equivalents and alternative constructions that fall within the spirit and scope of the invention as expressed in the claims.

[0027] Referring now to **FIG. 2**, there is illustrated a system **120** for configuring network devices **100**, **105**, **125**, **130** (collectively **135**) in accordance with the principles of the present invention. This embodiment includes a network manager unit **140** disposed between the administrator **110** and the network devices **135**, which can include routers, optical devices, etc. The network manager unit **140** also is connected to remote storage **145** (connected by network **150**) and a network manager support **155**.

[0028] To alter the configuration of a network device **135** or to add a network device to an existing network, the administrator **110** can access the network manager unit **140**, search for and retrieve the configuration record corresponding to a target network device, and through a series of interactive, wizard-like screens, change the configuration record for the target network device. This altered configuration record is stored in a central repository in the network manager unit **140** and can be checked against network policies accessible by the network manager unit **140**. Next, the network manager unit **140** can generate device-specific commands from the new configuration record and push those device-specific commands to the target network device or have the target network device pull the commands. Finally, the network manager unit **140** can verify that the new configuration was installed correctly at the target network device.

[0029] To generate the necessary device-specific commands, the network manager unit **140** may access the remote storage device **145** that can contain the various templates needed to generate device-specific commands for different types, brands and/or models of network devices. Each of these templates can contain variable fields corresponding to either information stored in the configuration records or information input directly by the administrator. The network manager unit **140** generates the device-specific commands by retrieving the appropriate template and filling in the variable fields with the data from the configuration records and/or data input directly by the administrator **110**. Once generated, these device-specific commands can be stored in the configuration record and/or they can be stored in the remote storage device **145** with an appropriate pointer stored in the configuration record.

[0030] As can be appreciated by those skilled in the art, the network manager unit **140** can be implemented on virtually any hardware system. Good results, however, have been achieved using components running the Red Hat™ LINUX Operating System and the Sun Solaris™ UNIX Operating System. In embodiments running either of these operating systems, the network manager unit **140** is configured to utilize the common services provided by that particular operating system.

[0031] Referring now to **FIG. 3**, there is illustrated in more detail the network manager unit **140** shown in **FIG. 2**. This embodiment of the network manager unit **140** includes six basic modules: an interface **160**, a directory **165**, a policy manager **170**, an event bus **175**, a health manager **180** and an action manager **185**. The illustrated connections between the various components are exemplary only. The components can be connected in a variety of ways without changing the basic operation of the system. Although the division of the network manager unit **140** into the six components is the presently preferred embodiment, the functions of these components could be subdivided, grouped together, deleted and/or supplemented so that more or less components can be utilized in any particular implementation. Thus, the network manager unit **140** can be embodied in several forms other than the one illustrated in **FIG. 3**.

[0032] Referring first to the interface module **160**, it is designed to exchange data with the administrator **110** (shown in **FIG. 2**) and, in some embodiments, with the network devices **135** (also shown in **FIG. 2**). Although the interface **160** could implement virtually any type of interface, good results have been achieved using a graphical, web interface. Other interfaces can be based upon wireless protocols such as WAP (wireless application protocol).

[0033] The second component of the network manager unit **140** is the event bus **175**. The event bus **175** includes a central posting location for receiving messages relating to network events. For example, when a configuration for a network device **135** is to be changed, an appropriate message can be published (or otherwise made available) to the event bus **175**. Similarly, if a network condition such as an error occurs, an appropriate message can be published to the event bus **175**. Notably, any message published to the event bus **175** can also be sent to the administrator **110** by way of the interface **160**. The administrator **110**, however, does not necessarily need to respond to a received message for the event to be addressed by the network manager unit **140**.

[0034] To determine the proper response for a message posted to the event bus **175**, the received message can be compared against the policies stored in the policy manager **170**, which is a repository for the business and network policies and rules used to manage the network. By using these rules and policies, an administrator **10** (shown in **FIG. 2**) can define a response for any event published to the event bus **175**. The defined response can be virtually anything including reconfiguring a network device, shutting down a network device and notifying an administrator.

[0035] In operation, the policy manager **170** can read a message posted to the event bus **175**. Alternatively, the event

bus **175** can automatically push the message to the policy manager **170**. Either way, however, the policy manager **170** uses the message to access the policy records that can be stored, for example, in a look-up table and to correlate the message to the appropriate response. Once the policy manager **170** has determined the appropriate response, that response is published to the event bus **175** as a work order that can be read by the action manager **185** and subsequently executed. That is, the action manager **185** can read the work order from the event bus **175** and perform the necessary tasks to complete that work order. In other embodiments, the work order can be sent directly to the action manager **185**. For example, assume that the action manager **185** reads a work order from the event bus **175** that indicates two routers—one a Cisco™ router and one a Juniper™ router—need to be enabled. The action manager **185** can locate each of these routers and determine the device-specific code needed to enable them. The code required to enable the Cisco™ router, for example, might be "enable_router" and the code required to enable the Juniper™ router might be "router_enable." Because the action manager **185** determines the appropriate device-specific code, however, the administrator **110** (shown in **FIG. 2**) only needs to generically indicate that both devices are to be enabled. The administrator **110** does not need to know the actual device-specific code required by each router.

[0036] In other embodiments, the action manager **185** can verify that the administrator **110** (shown in **FIG. 2**) has authority to make changes to network devices without authorization from additional parties. If additional authorization is required, the action manager **185** can post an appropriate message to the event bus **175**.

[0037] Still referring to **FIG. 3**, the directory **165** of the network manager unit **140** includes a central repository for storing the configuration records of each of the network devices connected to the network manager unit **140**. For example, the directory **165** could store a separate configuration record for each of network devices **100**, **105**, **125** and **130** shown in **FIG. 2**. In certain embodiments, several interconnected directories may be utilized, and in such systems, each directory can store a certain subset of the configuration records or a complete copy of all of the configuration records. Generally, such embodiments would employ multiple linked network manager units **140**, and in the embodiment where complete copies of the configuration records are stored in different directories, synchronization techniques can be used to guarantee data integrity.

[0038] The configuration records stored in the directory **165** are searchable by way of the interface **160**. That is, the administrator **110** or a component within the network manager **140** (shown in **FIG. 2**) can initiate a search through the interface **160** and the results of that search can be made available to the administrator **110** through the interface **160**. Moreover, the configuration records can be searched in any of a variety of ways. For example, the configuration records can be searched according to equipment type (e.g., routers, optical devices, etc.), device type (edge router, core router, etc.), device location, device manufacturer, device model, device name, operational status, etc. The directory **165** can be used to enable directory-based networking.

[0039] Referring now to the health manager **180**, it can be configured to monitor the overall health of the network and/or the health of individual network devices **135** (shown in **FIG. 2**) within the network. The health manager **180** can operate in an active mode and/or a passive mode. In the active mode, the health manager actively polls at least some of the network devices **135** about their status, utilization, congestion, etc. In the passive mode, the various network devices **135** automatically report to the health manager **180**. In either embodiment, however, the health manager **180** can collect individual device information and model overall network health. Additionally, the health manager **180** can publish messages regarding network device problems, projected network device problems, network problems, and/or projected network problems. The policy manager **170** can then determine the appropriate course of action to take for the particular message and the action manager **185** can implement that response.

[0040] In further embodiments, the health manager can monitor the health of the network manager components. For example, the health manager can monitor the operation of the event bus, the action manager and/or the directory. Moreover, the health manager can monitor the flow of data between the various components of the network manager.

[0041] Referring now to **FIG. 4**, there is illustrated in more detail the directory **165** shown in **FIG. 3**. This embodiment of the directory **165** consists of four interconnected modules: configuration storage **187**, configuration comparator **190**, configuration reader **195** and interface **200**. The directory **165**, however, does not need all of the modules to function in accordance with the principles of the present invention.

[0042] The configuration reader module **195** of the directory **165** is designed to initiate communication with (or directly communicate with) a target network device and retrieve that device's actual configuration. For example, the configuration reader can retrieve the actual configuration from the memory **115** of router **105** (shown in **FIG. 2**). This retrieved actual configuration can then be passed to the configuration comparator **190**. The configuration reader **195** can also retrieve the intended configuration of the target device from the configuration storage **187** and pass that intended configuration to the configuration comparator **190**. The configuration comparator **190** can then compare the actual configuration and the intended configuration and present the differences to the administrator **110** (shown in **FIG. 2**). In one embodiment, the differences in the configurations are not only presented literally, but also in a natural language summary form. Once the differences have been identified, they can be used to identify a failed configuration installation and/or to aid the administrator in creating the proper configuration for a device.

[0043] As previously discussed, the configuration storage **187** is designed to store configuration records corresponding to network devices such as network devices **135** shown in **FIG. 2**. In one embodiment the configuration storage **187** is designed not only to store the present configuration record for a network device, but also to store previous configuration records for that device. By storing these previous configurations, fault recovery and correction are vastly improved over present systems because prior, successful configurations can be quickly retrieved and used to replace new, faulty configurations. For example, a prior configuration of a previously known good state can be retrieved and installed

on the associated network device. This prior configuration could be days old or even weeks old. Prior configuration records can be distinguished hy version numbers and/or a time stamp. Additionally, each configuration record can include a searchable summary that includes notes on the coofiguratioo and why that configuration was modified.

[0044] Referriog oow to **FIG. 5**, there is illustrated a configuration record **205** for a typical network device. This coofiguration record **205** is divided into four portions: a common information model ("CIM") data portion **210**, a vendor data portion **215**, proprietary data portion **220** and a data pointer **225**. The CIM data portion **210** contains data relating to the physical attributes of a particular network device such as name, device type, number of interfaces, capacity, etc. The CIM data items are defined in the CIM Specification v2.2 and the CIM Schema v2.4, both of which are well known in the art and incorporated herein by reference.

[0045] The vendor data portion **215** of the configuration record contains standard vendor-specific data regarding the particular network device. For example, the vendor data portion **215** could indicate which version of an operating system that the network device is running or which features of the device are enabled. Generally, the data in the vendor data portion **215** is specific to each manufacturer and even to each model of network device.

[0046] The proprietary data portion **220** of the configuration record can contain data used by the network manager unit in configuring and managing the network devices. In one embodiment, for example, the proprietary data portion **220** includes a pointer to an address at which a core dump for a network device is stored. That is, if a router initiates a core dump, the location of that core dump could be recorded in the proprietary data portion **220** of the configuration record for that router. In other embodiments, the proprietary data portion **220** can store version numbers, time stamps, health records for a particular configuration, configuration summary data, configuration notes, etc.

[0047] The pointer portion **225** of the configuration record **205** can be used to point to a storage location where the actual device-specific commands for the associated network device are stored. Similarly, the pointer **225** could be configured to point to a storage location for a device-specific template for configuring a newly installed network device. In other embodiments, the pointer portion **225** of the configuration record can he supplemented or replaced with a storage location for actual device-specific code.

[0048] Referring now to **FIG. 6**, there is illustrated in more detail the event hus **175** shown in **FIG. 3**. As previously described, the event hus **175** is a posting location for messages relating to network events. Network devices as well as the other components of the network manager unit **140** (showo io **FIG. 2**) can address and post events to the eveot bus **175**.

[0049] The particular emhodiment of the event hus **175** shown in **FIG. 6** is comprised of four hasic modules: an interface **230**, a status storage **235**, an event queue **240**, and an event queue manager **245**. In operation, a message iodicating the occurrence of a network event is posted to the event queue **240** by way of the interface **230**. The messages stored at the event queue **240** are then made available to the policy manager **170** (shown in **FIG. 3**), so that a proper response can be determined. If the posted message is a work order from the policy manager **170**, the work order is made available to the action manager **185** (shown io **FIG. 3**) for subsequent implementation.

[0050] In one embodiment of the eveot bus **175**, ao event message is stored in status storage **235** along with a status field and an age field. Thus, for any message posted to the event bus **175**, its status and age can be continuously monitored. (The event bus can also get messages from client devices.) For example, status storage **235** could indicate that the status for a particular event is peoding in the action manager **185** (shown in **FIG. 3**), awaiting proper authorization, completed, stalled, etc. As the status changes from one status to another, appropriate messages can be generated and posted at the event queue **240**. For example, if the status of an event changes from pending to stalled, an appropriate message can be posted to the event queue **240** so that the policy manager **170** can determine how to respond. Similarly, if the age field in the status storage **235** indicates that a particular network event has not been addressed within a predetermined amount of time, that event can be requeued, deleted from the event queue **240**, or a new event notification indicating the delay can be generated and placed on the event queue **240**.

[0051] Referring now to **FIG. 7**, there is a flow chart of one method for configuring or reconfiguring a network device in accordance with the principles of the present invention. In this embodiment, the administrator **110** (shown in **FIG. 2**) initially logs in to the network manager unit **140** (Step **250**). Through a series of a graphical interfaces, the administrator **110** can select a network device that needs to be configured or reconfigured. The configuration record associated with the selected device can then be retrieved from the directory **165** (shown in **FIG. 3**) and presented to the administrator (Step **255**). If no configuration record is available for a selected device, the administrator **110** will be guided through a series of steps to build the configuration for that device. Otherwise, the administrator **110** can change parameters within the configuration record of the selected device and save those altered configuration records within the directory **165** (Step **260**). Notably, even though the configuration record for the selected network device has been changed, the actual configuration of the device has not been changed. Before the configuration of the device can be changed, an event message indicating that a configuration record has been altered should he published to the event bus **175** (shown in **FIG. 3**) (Step **265**). The policy manager **170** (shown in **FIG. 3**) then receives the event message, either by reading it from the event bus **175** or by receiving it from the event hus **175**, and determines if the configuration change is authorized (Step **270**). If the configuratioo chaoge is within the network rules and the administrator **110** (shown in **FIG. 2**) is authorized to make the change, a work order is published to the event bus (Step **280**). The actioo manager **185** (shown in **FIG. 3**) can then read the work order from the event bus **175** and carry out the necessary steps to implement the work order (Step **280**).

[0052] In one emhodiment, the action manager **185** (shown in **FIG. 3**) carries out the work order by locating the target network device, retrieving the appropriate configuration record from the directory **165** (shown in **FIG. 3**), generating the device-specific code corresponding to the

altered configuration (Step **290**), and pushing the device-specific code to the target network device (Step **295**). The action manger **185** can also store the device-specific code in a remote storage device, such as remote storage device **145** shown in FIG. **2**, and a pointer to the remote storage device can be recorded in the configuration record. Finally, the action manager **185** can verify that the device-specific code was properly transferred to the selected network device and that the network device is behaving accordingly (Step **300**). Assuming that the device-specific codes were installed correctly and that the network device is operating properly, a completion message is published to the event bus **175** (shown in FIG. **3**) (Step **305**).

[**0053**] In conclusion, the present system provides, among other things, a method and apparatus to configure, monitor and manage network devices without regard for device type and/or manufacturer. Those skilled in the art, however, can readily recognize that numerous variations and substitutions may be made in the invention, its use and its configuration to achieve substantially the same results as achieved by the embodiments described herein. Accordingly, there is no intention to limit the invention to the disclosed exemplary forms. Many variations, modifications and alternative constructions fall within the scope and spirit of the disclosed invention as expressed in the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A computerized method for configuring a network device, the method comprising the steps of:

retrieving a configuration record from a common repository of configuration records, the retrieved configuration record being associated with the network device;

modifying the retrieved configuration record;

storing the modified configuration record in the common repository;

generating at least one device-specific command corresponding to the modified configuration record; and

transferring the generated first device-specific command to the network device.

2. The computerized method of claim **1**, further comprising the step of:

searching the common repository for the configuration record;

wherein the configuration record is one of a plurality of configuration records stored in the common repository.

3. The computerized method of claim **1**, further comprising the step of:

publishing a message to an event bus;

wherein the published message indicates that the retrieved configuration record has been modified.

4. The computerized method of claim **1**, further comprising the step of:

verifying that the modified configuration record complies with a network policy.

5. The computerized method of claim **4**, further comprising the step of:

publishing a work order to an event bus in response to verifying that the modified configuration record complies with a network policy.

6. The method of claim **1**, further comprising the step of:

verifying the successful completion of the step of transferring the generated first device-specific command to the network device.

7. The method of claim **1**, further comprising the step of:

receiving an event notification at an event bus, the event notification being generated by the network device;

wherein the step of retrieving the configuration record is initiated in response to the receiving of the event notification at the event bus.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of generating the at least one device-specific command comprises the steps of:

retrieving a device-specific command template, wherein the device-specific command template comprises at least one variable field; and

populating the at least one variable field with data included in the modified configuration record.

9. The method of claim **8**, wherein the retrieved configuration record indicates that the network device is from a particular manufacturer, and wherein the retrieved device-specific command template is unique to the particular manufacturer.

10. The method of claim **8**, wherein the retrieved configuration record indicates that the network device is a particular device type and wherein the retrieved device-specific command template is unique to the particular device type.

11. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of retrieving the configuration record comprises the step of:

retrieving the configuration record from a distributed common repository.

12. A system for configuring a network including a plurality of network devices, the system comprising:

an event posting component configured to receive a network event posting related to a first of the plurality of network devices; and

an action manager in communication with the event posting component, the action manager configured to receive the network event posting and to configure the first of the plurality of network devices in accordance with the network event posting.

13. The system of claim **12**, further comprising:

a configuration storage module in communication with the event posting component, the configuration storage module configured to store at least one configuration record for each of the plurality of network devices;

wherein the action manager is configured to configure the first of the plurality of network devices by utilizing a configuration record corresponding to the first of the plurality network device.

14. The system of claim **13**, wherein the configuration storage module comprises a distributed storage arrangement.

15. The system of claim **12**, further comprising:

a policy manager in communication with the event posting component.

16. The system of claim 12, further comprising:

a health manager in communication with the event posting component;

wherein the health manager is configured to monitor the health of at least one of the plurality of network devices and to report the health of the at least one of the plurality of network devices to the event posting component.

17. The system of claim 12, wherein the event posting component comprises:

a central posting location.

18. The system of claim 12, wherein the event posting component comprises:

a distributed posting location.

19. The system of claim 12, further comprising:

a device-specific template storage module in communication with the action manager, the device-specific template storage module configured to store a plurality of device-specific command templates.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the action manager is configured to read a first of the plurality of device-specific templates from the device-specific template storage module and generate a device-specific command using the read device-specific template;

wherein the generated device-specific command is enabled to configure the first of the plurality of network devices in accordance with the network posting.

21. A system for configuring a network including a plurality of network devices, the system comprising:

a configuration storage module configured to store at least one configuration record for each of the plurality of network devices; and

an action manager in communication with the configuration storage module, the action manager configured to receive an indication that a first of the configuration records has been altered, and the action manager being further configured to generate a device-specific command for a network device included in the plurality of network devices, wherein the network device corresponds to the first of the configuration records.

22. The system of claim 21, further comprising:

an event posting component configured to provide to the action manager the indication that the first of the configuration records has been altered.

23. The system of claim 21, further comprising:

a policy manager in communication with the event posting component.

24. The system of claim 21, further comprising:

a device-specific template storage module in communication with the action manager, the device-specific template storage module configured to store a plurality of device-specific command templates;

wherein at least a first of the plurality of device-specific command templates is usable by the action manager to generate the device-specific command for the network device.

25. A system for configuring a network device, the system comprising:

at least a first processing element configured to execute instructions;

at least a first memory device electronically coupled with the at least a first processing element; and

a plurality of instructions stored on the memory device, the plurality of instructions configured to cause the at least a first processing element to perform the steps of:

retrieving a configuration record from a common repository of configuration records, the retrieved configuration record being associated with the network device;

modifying the retrieved configuration record;

storing the modified configuration record in the common repository;

generating at least a first device-specific command corresponding to the modified configuration record; and

transferring the generated first device-specific command to the network device.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein the plurality of instructions are further configured to cause the at least a first processor to perform the step of:

searching the common repository for the configuration record;

wherein the configuration record is one of a plurality of configuration records stored in the common repository.

27. The system of claim 25, wherein the plurality of instructions are further configured to cause the at least a first processor to perform the step of:

publishing a message to an event bus;

wherein the published message indicates that the retrieved configuration record has been modified.

28. The system of claim 25, wherein the plurality of instructions are further configured to cause the at least a first processor to perform the step of:

verifying that the modified configuration record complies with a network policy.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein the plurality of instructions are further configured to cause the at least a first processor to perform the step of:

publishing a work order to an event bus in response to verifying that the modified configuration record complies with a network policy.

30. The system of claim 28, wherein the plurality of instructions are further configured to cause the at least a first processor to perform the step of:

verifying the successful completion of the step of transferring the generated first device-specific command to the network device.

31. The system of claim 25, wherein the plurality of instructions are further configured to cause the at least a first processor to perform the step of:

receiving an event notification at an event bus, the event notification being generated by the network device;

wherein the step of retrieving the configuration record is initiated in response to the receiving of the event notification at the event bus.

32. The system of claim 25, wherein the plurality of instructions are configured to cause the at least a first processor to generate the at least a first device-specific command by:

retrieving a device-specific command template, wherein the device-specific command template comprises at least one variable field; and

populating the at least one variable field with data included in the modified configuration record.

33. The system of claim 32, wherein the retrieved configuration record indicates that the network device is from a particular manufacturer and wherein the retrieved device-specific command template is unique to the particular manufacturer.

34. The system of claim 32, wherein the retrieved configuration record indicates that the network device is a particular device type and wherein the retrieved device-specific command template is unique to the particular device type.

35. The system of claim 25, wherein the plurality of instructions are configured to cause the at least a first processor to perform the step of retrieving the configuration record by:

retrieving the configuration record from a distributed common repository.

36. A system for configuring a network device, the system comprising:

means for retrieving a configuration record from a common repository of configuration records, the retrieved configuration record associated with the network device;

means for modifying the retrieved configuration record; and

means for storing the modified configuration record in the common repository.

37. The system of claim 36, further comprising:

means for generating at least a first device-specific command corresponding to the modified configuration record; and

means for transferring the generated first device-specific command to the network device.

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